

CAPTURE, SACK and DESTRUCTION OF THE City of Columbia.

XVIII.

This surely is very piteous to hear; and were the case an isolated one, it would probably move compassion in every heart; but where the miseries of like and worse sort, of a whole community of twenty thousand, are massed, as it were, together before the eyes, the sensibilities become obtuse, and the universal suffering seems to destroy the sensibilities in all. We shall not seek to multiply instances like the foregoing, which would be an endless work and to little profit; and the mind of the reader can readily conceive them, when we know that Sherman dismissed his mercenaries with a general license to forage upon the people for thirty-six hours. He tells General Hampton that, could he find any civil authorities, and could they provide him with forage and provisions, he would suffer no foraging upon the people. His logic and memory are equally deficient. Was there no Mayor and Council in Columbia? They had formally surrendered the city into his hands. They constituted the civil authority; but he made no requisition upon them for provisions for his troops. He did not say to them, "Supply me with 20,000 rations in so many hours." Had he done so, the rations would have been forthcoming. The citizens would have been only too glad, by yielding up one-half of their stores, to have saved the other half, and to have preserved their dwellings from the pollution of the enemy's footsteps and presence. *Nay, did not the dwellers of every house—we will say 5,000 houses—seek at his hands a special guard—which usually consisted of two men—and were not these fed wholly by the families where they lodged during the whole time of their stay? Here, by a very simple computation, we find that ten thousand soldiers were thus voluntarily provided with rations; and a requisition for twenty thousand men might easily and would probably have been provided, had any such been made; for the supplies in the city were abundant of every sort—the population generally having laid in largely, and without stint or limit, anticipating a period of general scarcity from the march of the enemy. But, even had the people been unable to supply these provisions—even had the Council failed to respond to these requisitions—at whose doors should the blame be laid? The failure would have been the direct consequence of General Sherman's own proceedings. Had he not ravaged and swept, with a consuming fire, all the tracts of country upon which the people of Columbia depended for their subsistence? Had he not, himself, cut off all means of subsistence, in the destruction, not only of the railroads, but of every wagon, cart, and mule on all the plantations through which he passed—carrying off all the valuable property of any value, and ruthlessly cutting the throats of the remainder? He cuts*

off the feet and arms of a people, and then demands that they shall bring him food and forage!

But even this pretext, if well grounded, can avail him nothing. *He was suffering from no sort of necessity. It was the boast of every officer and soldier in his army, that he had fed fat upon the country through which he had passed; everywhere finding abundance, and had not once felt the necessity of lifting the cover from his own wagons, and feeding from his own accumulated stores. The incapacity of the man strangles his logic. But the complaint of Hampton, and of our people at large, is not that he fed his followers upon the country, but that he destroyed what he did not need for food, and tore the bread from the famishing mouths of a hundred thousand women and children—feeble infancy and decrepit age; and this, too, coupling with the robbery and incendiarism, deeds of the foulest violence, the most reckless debauchery, the meanest practices of thief and outlaw. But to our narrative.*

XIX.

We have adverted to the deeper black of those horrid outrages which were perpetrated within the households of the citizen, where, unrestrained by the rebuking eyes of their own comrades, and unresisted by their interposition, cupidity, malignity and lust, sought to glut their several appetites. The cupidity generally triumphed over the lust. The greed for gold and silver swallowed up the more animal passions, and drunkenness supervened in season for the safety of many. We have heard of some few outrages, or attempts at outrage, of the worst sort, but the instances, in the case of white females, must have been very few. There was, perhaps, a wholesome dread, on the part of the ruffians, of goading to desperation the people whom they had despoiled of all but honor. They could see, in many watchful and guardian eyes, the lurking expression which threatened sharp vengeance should their trespasses proceed to those extremes which they yet unquestionably contemplated. The venerable Mr. H. stood ready, with his *couteau de chasse*, made bare in his bosom, hovering around the persons of his innocent daughters. Mr. O., on beholding some too familiar approach to one of his daughters by one of the ruffians, bade him stand off at the peril of his life, saying that, while he submitted to be robbed of property, he would sacrifice life without reserve—his own and that of the assailant—before his child's honor should be abused. Mr. James G. Gibbs with difficulty, pistol in hand, and only with the assistance of a Yankee officer, rescued two young women from the clutches of as many ruffians. We have been told of successful outrages of this unmentionable character being practiced upon women dwelling in the suburbs. Many are understood to have taken place in remote country settlements, and two cases are described where young negroesses were brutally forced by the wretches and afterwards murdered—one of them being thrust, when

half dead, head down, into a mud-puddle, and there held until she was suffocated. But this must suffice. The shocking detail should not now be made, but that we need, for the sake of truth and humanity, to put on record, in the fullest types and columns, the horrid deeds of these marauders upon all that is pure and precious—all that is sweet and innocent—all that is good, gentle, gracious, dear and ennobling—within the regards of white and Christian civilization. And yet, we should grossly err if, while showing the forbearance of the Yankees in respect to our white men, we should convey to any innocent reader the notion that they exhibited a like forbearance in the case of the black. The poor negroes were terribly victimized by their brutal assailants, many of them, besides the instance mentioned, being left in a condition little short of death. Regiments, in successive relays, subjected scores of these poor women to the torture of their embraces, and—but we dare not farther pursue the subject—it is one of such loathing and horror. There are some horrors which the historian dare not pursue—which the painter dare not delineate. They both drop the curtain over crimes which humanity bleeds to contemplate.

Some incidents of gross brutality, which show how well prepared were these demons for every crime, however monstrous, may be given.

A lady, undergoing the pains of labor, had to be borne out on a mattress into the open air, to escape the fire. It was in vain that her situation was described to the incendiaries, as they applied the torch within and without the house, after they had penetrated every chamber and robbed them of all that was either valuable or portable. They themselves beheld the situation of the sufferer, and laughed to scorn the prayer for her safety.

Another case was that of Mrs. —, a widow. Her corpse, decked for the grave, was surrounded by watchful mourners, sisters and daughters. Into this sacred presence the ruffians made their way, plundering as they went, making offensive comments, and exhibiting no sort of regard to the solemn preparations for the grave which they beheld, or for the bereaved sufferers, silent in their sad offices of love.

Another lady, Mrs. J., was but recently confined. Her condition was very helpless. Her life hung upon a hair. The demons were apprised of all the facts in the case. They burst into the chamber—took the rings from the lady's fingers—pinched the watch from beneath her pillow—shrieked offensive language in her ears, and so overwhelmed her with terror, that she sunk under the treatment—surviving their departure but a day or two. Language fails in all adequate speech, when it would properly characterize the nature of these demons or their diabolical performances.

In several cases, newly made graves were opened, the coffins taken out, broken open, in search of buried treasure, and the corpses left